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Consciousness-Raising or Unintentionally Oppressive?

Abstract

Photovoice is typically used in community and participatory research to allow people to document and interpret their everyday lived experiences. However, often photovoice is used as a research method without deep reflection on its underlying goals and epistemological commitments to critically empower its participants and spark reflective dialogue within a community. This article showcases selections from a photovoice exhibit and its accompanying survey of exhibit attendees to explore possible negative unintended consequences of this action-oriented approach to research if researchers are not appropriately reflexive in how photovoice is used. Drawing on a long-term participatory action research (PAR) project with a research collective consisting of this article's first author (a White, female university-based researcher), 25 Latino/a high school students and their White teacher, and through rigorous qualitative analysis of the stories that accompanied the photography as well as of the survey responses, the authors conclude that researchers and research collectives that use a photovoice approach to motivating social change and working for consciousness-raising must be careful to not unintentionally perpetuate status quo understandings of an issue or even unconsciously allow for a deeper entrenching of subtly oppressive treatment of historically marginalized populations.

Keywords

Photovoice, Participatory Action Research, Latino Education

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Consciousness-Raising or Unintentionally Oppressive? Potential Negative Consequences of Photovoice

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Photovoice is typically used in community and participatory research to allow people to document and interpret their everyday lived experiences. However, often photovoice is used as a research method without deep reflection on its underlying goals and epistemological commitments to critically empower its participants and spark reflective dialogue within a community. This article showcases selections from a photovoice exhibit and its accompanying survey of exhibit attendees to explore possible negative unintended consequences of this action-oriented approach to research if researchers are not appropriately reflexive in how photovoice is used. Drawing on a long-term participatory action research (PAR) project with a research collective consisting of this article's first author (a White, female university-based researcher), 25 Latino/a high school students and their White teacher, and through rigorous qualitative analysis of the stories that accompanied the photography as well as of the survey responses, the authors conclude that researchers and research collectives that use a photovoice approach to motivating social change and working for consciousness-raising must be careful to not unintentionally perpetuate status quo understandings of an issue or even unconsciously allow for a deeper entrenching of subtly oppressive treatment of historically marginalized populations. Keywords: Photovoice, Participatory Action Research, Latino Education

Reaching toward goals of consciousness raising, equity building, and policy changing, Photovoice is typically used in community and participatory research to allow people to document and interpret their everyday lived experiences (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001; Wang, 2003, 2006). It is a critical approach to empowering or “un-silencing” groups often unheard by hegemonic research processes and powerful policy circles. It seeks to allow these historically marginalized groups, like those with (dis)ability labels, ethnic and racial minorities, and youth, to take control over identifying their needs, desires, and thoughts, effectively producing authentic knowledge about themselves, their lives, and their communities, rather than being told about themselves (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991).

But what if this doesn't happen? As researchers, teachers, and those who work for social change, we are often subtly and sometimes explicitly pressured to present the good face of our research and programs, of what works out, what people like, or what gets noticed. But what if things don't work out? What if our approach had negative consequences? The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to join the dialogue about what might not have worked perfectly in educational research in order to avoid potential unintended consequences in future studies; and second, to explore the boundaries and limits of approaches like photovoice as a way to raise awareness of its potential for oppression.

Literature Review

Our discussion of awareness, consciousness-raising, and oppression is based on Paulo Freire's (1970) conception of the oppressive relationship. We frame our understandings of

how to free ourselves from that oppressive relationship by pulling from several theories that share critical epistemologies including critical theory, feminist theory, and critical race theory. We join with many other participatory action researchers (Cahill, 2007; Guishard, 2009; Torre & Fine, 2006; Tuck, 2009) who share this critical epistemology to argue that people who have experienced oppression are the experts of their own lives and their own experiences and should have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in shaping and guiding the research that explores those experiences. We join with Freire (1982) and the previously cited authors, as well as countless critical scholars and educators, to argue that these community-based experts are too often silenced both in and through more traditional research processes as well as in policy conversations that determine much of their everyday lives. Photovoice, then, is a fitting research method to both “un-silence” these communities through the research process and allow their voices to be heard in policy circles.

A review of recent literature on photovoice, though, reveals that many of those of us who employ a photovoice approach to community-based, empowering research do so without critical reflection on its underlying epistemology as well as its potential for many thorny ethical dilemmas, including but not limited to invasion of privacy and critical issues of recruitment, representation, participation ownership and advocacy (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). There seems to be over the past few decades a simplistic, uncritical reliance on photovoice that has the potential to take a paternalistic, voyeuristic, and condescending view of research participants, collectives, and communities, one that assumes deficiencies and a lack of power or voice. Wang (2003, 2006) and Wilson et al. (2007) remind us that rather than an approach that assumes its own worth, photovoice should be used as a tool for collective social planning, issue identification, and participatory evaluation. It should be a first step in participatory research, rather than a last step, used for needs assessment and planning rather than the exposition of a community’s deficiencies or desires (Wang, 2003).

We attempt here to show how these potential unintended negative consequences of using photovoice can occur. We begin our discussion by introducing the method used to conduct the study. Then we present the results of our critical analysis of responses to the survey that was taken by the photovoice exhibit attendees. We conclude with a discussion of how unintended negative consequences of using photovoice might be avoided in the first place. Overall our goal is to uncover ways in which university-based researchers can facilitate participatory research that is highly cognizant of its own potential for unintentionally perpetuating this silencing by using photovoice as a moment of exposition rather than assessment and evaluation.

Method

In 2012 I, this article’s first author, was invited by Mrs. Christine James, a White Spanish language teacher at Atkinville High School in Idaho, USA, to visit one of the classes she taught.¹ Atkinville has, in the past three decades, seen a dramatic shift in its population makeup, from almost 100 percent White to about 66 percent White, 33 percent Latino/a in just a few decades (United States Census Bureau, 1990, 2010). Atkinville High School is almost 50 percent Latino/a, 50 percent White (National Center for Education Statistics). It has one Latino administrator and two Latino/a teachers. There are no staff members that are Latino/a.

Two years before I was invited to the school, Mrs. James’ class, Spanish Speakers Serving (SSS), was specially designed for Atkinville High School’s burgeoning Latino student population to gain increased access to higher education through various service and leadership

¹ This study was approved by Indiana University’s Institutional Review Board. For details please contact the corresponding author.

opportunities. Mrs. James contacted me because of our shared interest in the goal of empowerment through education. At this point in my academic career, I was interested in the potential for participatory approaches to research to be empower those who engage in it. After her initial invitation I suggested to Mrs. James that we form a research collective with her students from the SSS class to work on research that was meaningful to them.

I met with Mrs. James and the SSS class members several times over the course of a week in the fall of 2012. After discussions about what was important to them, what they wanted to learn more about, and what bothered them in their everyday lives, they formed a research question: Why are our teachers racist? From that time to 2014 our research collective worked together on a project that explored and challenged racism at Atkinville High School.

We, this article's authors, were geographically separated from the rest of the research collective for most of those two years. I, this article's first author, traveled to Idaho first in 2012, then again in March 2013, May 2013, October 2013, and finally in January 2014. Each visit lasted between seven and ten days. When we were not physically together our collective met often via programs like Skype to discuss and debrief on data collection, analysis, and findings.

Between October 2012 and March 2013 the SSS students and Mrs. James engaged in Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1985) to share and more fully understand their own experiences with racism, particularly racial aggression they felt emanating from their White teachers.² The SSS students wrote out experiences they had had with racism at their school or in their community and then acted out each experience. At first each scene was acted out without any interruption. Then students acted the scene out again, inviting other students to comment, ask questions, or challenge what was happening in the scene.

At my visit in March 2013 our collective followed up on this exploration of racism by interviewing four teachers about their perceptions of and experiences with racism at the school. I also interviewed eleven other teachers and administrators individually because the students in the collective believed teachers would more openly reveal their perspectives on race and racism to me, as a White adult. Of the teachers I interviewed, nine self-identified as White, two as Latino/a.

After conducting these interviews and collectively analyzing portions of them for emergent themes, our collective agreed that one of the issues that we wanted to address was that of cultural misunderstanding between White teachers and students and Latino/a students at Atkinville High School. The SSS students felt like a photovoice exhibit would help bridge the cultural misunderstanding and resulting racial aggression they experienced at their school and in their community. So, over the next two months the SSS students took pictures that represented their lives and their experiences with racism. They then wrote short stories that explained or gave context to the photos they would display. Then in May 2013 we held a photovoice exhibit to present those photos and stories and garner feedback about our larger project on racism.

To collect this feedback we created a simple web-based survey together as a way to gauge how exhibit attendees reacted both to the exhibit as well as to the overall project on racism. The survey questions focused on attendees' expectations of the exhibit as contrasted with their experience during the exhibit. Therefore, a question asked, "What did you think about the exhibit before you entered the school library? What were your expectations?" Later

² Theatre of the Oppressed was created by Augusto Boal (1985) as a way of engaging in the pedagogy of the oppressed, as articulated by Paulo Freire (1970). For Freire, liberating people from oppression meant raising people's awareness and helping people discover new ways of knowing, acting, and being. Boal argued that by using theatre to explore social events and issues our awareness could shift and we could learn to act in new ways (Dennis 2009). By finding new ways of acting in particular situations, we could find new ways of being, and, in turn, liberate ourselves from the oppressive relationship (Dennis 2009).

a question asks, “What was the most interesting or inspiring story and/or photograph? Why?” And finally, “What was one thing you learned from this exhibit?” The students’ goal in creating the survey was to create some space for attendees to reflect on their expectations of and experience at the exhibit.

The exhibit was on display in the students’ school library for a period of two weeks, during which time students, teachers, school administrators, and family and community members were invited to both view the exhibit and take the brief survey about their experience. Over 90 percent of the respondents self-identified as Atkinville High School students. Only one teacher responded to the survey. Other respondents included community members/parents (2) and school district administrators (2). For the purposes of this article we focused mainly on the responses students gave to the three open-ended questions included in the survey.

Analysis

Although the exhibit featured photos and stories from all of the students involved in the project at the time, ethical constraints on our ability to show the faces of our participants has limited what we include here as examples. Below we pull from our analysis of all of the photos and stories that were displayed as well as the 62 completed surveys as a way to compare the implicit intentions of the student researchers in presenting the photography and stories with the effects of the exhibit on those who viewed it.

Although this entire project was a participatory action research project, this article’s authors saw only after the project had come to a close that more work needed to be done to more fully understand why the photovoice exhibit seemed to lead to a deeper entrenching of uncritical perspectives of the Latino experience in the United States. Therefore, we engaged in critical thematic and reconstructive horizon analyses of all the images and stories that were used as a part of this photovoice exhibit. Our analysis was based in Carspecken’s (1996) critical ethnographic approach, in which he suggests “reconstruct[ing] into explicit discourse cultural and subjective factors that are largely tacit in nature” (p. 93). In order to accomplish this we first constructed meaningfields for data. These meaningfields allowed us to list a range of possible meanings for portions of data and to start to find ambiguities in the data. Following Carspecken’s (1996) advice we then engaged in meaning reconstruction as a way to clarify our initial impressions and questions (p. 102). I, this article’s first author, engaged in an initial, low inference level reconstruction and then submitted that to this article’s second author as a peer debriefer. We then discussed our analysis and conducted a kind of calibration in order to move toward conclusions about backgrounded and foregrounded meanings (Carspecken, 1996, pp. 103-106). The responses to photo themes included here were developed by following this process.

Results

Photo Theme 1: My Family is the Most Important Thing to Me

Many of the stories and pictures displayed by the students sent both explicit and implicit messages about the importance of their family. Several students titled stories referencing the importance of their family, like Alexa’s “My Family’s Ways” and Mila’s “Mami Gloria,” which was a story about how much she loved her grandmother.³ Other students wrote about their

³ All names included here are pseudonyms, per Institutional Review Board requirements. All pseudonyms were chosen by the participant. Some participants also chose to remain anonymous. When this was the case it was noted as such. Not all “Anonymous” refer to the same participant. Because all survey responses were anonymous no attribution is made.

gratitude for their family or for a particular family member: “My family is the greatest thing that’s ever happened to me. They have been there for me through it all. I don’t even have words to explain how much they mean to me.” Another student reflected on the love she has for her family, even when they fight or disagree: “My family is my biggest treasure and I will always love them no matter how many times I disagree with them.”

One of the main subthemes to emerge from the students’ stories through our process of engaging in reconstructive horizon analysis is the idea that parents, grandparents and family members have worked and sacrificed much for their children, these students. One student, Sebastian, wrote the story of his parents’ 1987 Toyota Celica GT that they drove until both of them were deported, one soon after the other. Sebastian talked about how he lived in that car until he was able to move in with a relative. He concludes his story by saying that every time he gets in that car he remembers his parents:

Every time I put on my seat belt I am reminded of my mom's overprotectiveness and my dad's annoying, redundant warnings. Whenever I drive I remember my mom is always looking out for me and that she loved me. Cherishing how reliable the little car is and how my mom always has supported me. I have been given the teenage dream to get rid of my parents ... but I was not ready to run my life and have financial responsibilities.

Here Sebastian references things about families and family life that most of us have either experienced or can understand. He talks about how his mom always supported him, that she looked out for and loved him unconditionally. He also references a common “teenage dream” of being independent from his parents. All of these ideas would, to many, seem to cross racial or ethnic divides and build understanding between different populations.

A second subtheme is that the families of these students are dependent on one another. An example of this comes from a story written by Victoria. She reflects on a phrase her father has repeated throughout her life, a phrase that she says she will always remember: “‘We’re all in the same boat. If it sinks, we’re all going down.’ That is what my father says when times get tough. If one suffers, the rest of us do too because we don’t like to see the other go through pain.” Again, this is a theme that would seemingly build bridges of understanding and empathy.

A third subtheme related to the importance of family is that of parents or grandparents accomplishing dreams. Mila wrote about her father’s dream of becoming a veterinarian, a dream that was never realized:

My father's dream since he was young was to be a veterinarian, considering his love of animals. Unfortunately, with the circumstances he faced, coming to the U.S. was the best choice, and shattered his dream of becoming a vet. Instead, he began working as a dairyman. As sad as this is to say, working among cows was as close to his dream as my father got. After years of working in dairies, my dad became the veterinarian at the dairy he was working in; not exactly his dream job, but close enough to what he once dreamed of as a teen.

Mila goes on to reflect on her own life and her own dreams, saying that she has learned much from her father, and even though her father’s dream was never fulfilled he is still “the strongest person I know on the face of the earth.”

All of these stories, titles, and comments reflect an overall theme that family is one of the most important aspects of these students’ culture and lives. With this in mind we expected that the students’ teachers and peers would respond positively and in ways that showed exhibit

attendees' growing understanding that, Latino or White, they shared similar appreciation for, dedication toward, and dependence on their families. While this might have been true on the surface (or "foreground," to use Carspecken's words), when we looked deeper (backgrounded) we saw threads of continued misunderstanding and an entrenching us-versus-them paradigm.

Responses to the Importance of Family

We engaged in rigorous and methodical critical thematic and reconstructive horizon analysis of the survey responses related to photos and stories that illustrated the participants' dedication to family as a way to ground our findings in the data. As a result, we found that responses to these stories about the importance of family often focused on a respondent's stated lack of ability to understand the storyteller's circumstances. Referring to Sebastian's story about his parents' car, one respondent said:

I think that the story where the father was deported and then the mother was deported at a later date was most inspiring to me. I can't even imagine what that would be like to have both parents absent from my life and siblings to help care for.

Our horizon analysis of this response showed that sympathetic, caring emotions toward Sebastian and his parents are foregrounded; that is, they are what we see on the surface. These emotions and thoughts are what the survey respondent was himself most likely consciously intending to express. However, as we focused in on the respondent's words, "I can't even imagine," we found that the respondent was, possibly unconsciously and in the background of the horizon of meaning, portraying a sense of deep separation between himself and Sebastian. The respondent's life was so different from Sebastian's and his experiences so foreign that he could not even imagine himself living Sebastian's experiences. So, even though our goal for this photovoice exhibit was to bring Latino/a and White members of the high school community closer together through increased understanding, this response showed the opposite effect.

Another student-respondent referenced Sebastian's story with the same idea of not being able to imagine herself in that experience:

I thought the one about the car and his parents being deported was the most interesting. It brought a tear to my eye reading about how his dad was deported and then how his mom was and how he had to provide for his own stuff. I couldn't imagine living life without my dad and mom. I hope he gets to reunite with his parents soon.

In addition to the same idea of not being able to understand Sebastian's life experience ("I couldn't imagine living life without my mom and dad"), there is an overall sympathy that the survey respondent is consciously portraying. This sympathy is definitely foregrounded in this and other responses. However, the last line in this response, "I hope he gets to reunite with his parents soon," representative of several other survey responses, illustrates a certain lack of critical reflection about the students' photos and stories and what they mean for their everyday lives. The responses almost sound like get-well cards that wish the students and their families well in their difficult lives and struggles to survive: "I loved the story about the car. There was so much passion and heartache put into the story. It made me feel for them. I hope they make it through."

Yet other responses foregrounded an ostensibly newfound understanding of the Latino culture in general and of these students and their lives in particular. One student-respondent said that the most important thing he/she learned from the exhibit was “that a lot of Latinos are family-oriented and hard workers.” Another student-respondent said he/she liked the “one of the girl’s brother dropped out of school for her to go to school,” reflecting that she learned “how much these families care for each other.” Again, there is a lack of critical reflection that became more disconcerting to us the more often we saw it in the survey responses.

Our analysis of the survey responses showed us that survey responses most often reflected a backgrounded us-them paradigm. For these respondents, the stories and pictures seemed to reinforce an unconscious treatment of the storytellers as the Other. One student-respondent referred to Sebastian’s story about his parents’ car, saying, “It made me realize I have a good life.” Of course taken at face value this statement might relay a sense of gratitude for one’s own station in life. Looking deeper than this consciously foregrounded gratitude, though, our reconstructive horizon analysis uncovered a backgrounded, ingrained sense of separation between the White and Latino communities in this town, represented by common themes of “We have it good. They have it bad.” These themes were often accompanied by a condescending pity that could carry with it the potential to reinforce a relationship of oppression. This pity is illustrated by another respondent’s remarks about the exhibit’s stories and photographs:

I really enjoyed both the stories and the photographs. I really liked the stories that told that the care for their families and a lot of them their parents dropped out of school just to support their whole families. I really liked the one that said they want to get a good job that will pay good so their dad can rest.

Again, while most of these responses foreground emotions of caring and sweetness, our analysis revealed a backgrounded lack of critical reflection. This lack of reflection could also be seen as condescending, even paternalistic. We are concerned that because of this lack of reflection there is certain potential for more deeply ingraining unconscious us-them separations and understandings, which can reinforce the oppressive relationship in this community and at this school.

Photo Theme 2: Working Hard, Making Sacrifices, and Overcoming Challenges is a Necessary Part of My Life

Another major theme that emerged from the picture and story data was that working hard, making sacrifices, and overcoming challenges was a necessary and integral part of the lives of these SSS students and their families, and those challenges and sacrifices formed a major part of their identity. These messages are related to the first theme, the importance of family, because most of the challenges and sacrifices referred to and depicted by the student-storyteller-photographers are made either by or for family members. However, there is a marked difference. While those messages about the importance of family seemed to build bridges and connections between the Latino and White populations at Atkinville High School, the messages of working hard and making sacrifices focus on the differences students see between themselves and their White teachers. That said, by telling these stories the SSS students are giving their White teachers and peers an opportunity to better understand their different lives. The issue then becomes whether or not the White exhibit attendees take that opportunity in a critically reflective way.

Our analysis revealed the idea of working hard in generations that have come before as well as the message that “we all need to make sacrifices to have a better life, and I’m not going

to give up” were highlighted throughout the students’ story data. Never giving up seemed very important to the storytellers: “To this day my mom has worked very hard to be in the place she is today. And thanks to her I learned to never give up and to always try one more time” (Sussy).

Another message that came out several times during data analysis was that of responsibility and duty, that working hard is a responsibility for these students: “...my responsibility is to give my future children more than my parents gave me” (Stephanie). One student-storyteller wrote his story in third person, talking about himself, that he took this duty to work hard so seriously that he dropped out of school so that his sister could get an education: “So to help with all of their problems he dropped out of school and started working. And since he dropped out of school his sister got to go to school and have an education” (Victor).

We also saw this theme of the necessity of working hard and making sacrifices repeatedly reveal itself through stories and reflections that connected working hard with a student’s future education and/or career. Student-storyteller-photographers suggested that getting a good education or job would be the way to make their families proud and, essentially, pay them back for all the challenges they went through or are going through:

I desire a better life for my family, but especially for my father and brother. Due to my brother’s disability, my father has had to work twice as hard for him. My brother will get older, so taking care of him will be more difficult for my mother. I desire to go to college for them so that I can give them a life with fewer difficulties. (Victoria)

Our analysis also highlighted this theme as it emerged through stories in which students wrote details about how hard parents worked, the long hours they worked, and the poor conditions in which they worked:

I have a father who worked long hours in a dairy, barely making enough money to put food on the table. He sometimes worked on the weekends cooking for parties so there was that little extra money. My mother did not have the opportunity to get a job because she stayed home to raise five children but tried to earn money by decorating or making decorations for parties. Seeing them struggle made me realize that sometimes we have to let go of things or certain habits like going out to parties because their struggles are struggles for us. Those struggles will become my success when I graduate and go to college because they will see me. I am where I am because they fought to bring me there. (Rosa)

These stories about the value of work also touch on the idea that hard-working parents and family members are the students’ role models and that the students want to be like them:

My dad is who I look up to. Growing up until now he has been my role model and I've always wanted to be like him. I know how hard my dad has worked all his life and even today. Every day he wakes up and feeds the cows for an hour, goes to work at his radio station for four to five hours, come home, and feeds cows again. Somewhere in there, he finds time to eat and he doesn't go to sleep on a good day until around 10pm. He used to get up at 6am and start this cycle, but he got too tired and started to wake up later. My dad is the reason I work so hard, so I can go to college, basically for free and to eventually make enough money so he doesn't have to work so hard, and he can finally relax. (Wilfred)

Accompanied by pictures of worn work boots and men working in dairies, these stories were powerful in relaying the message to exhibit attendees that working hard and making sacrifices was not only important to these students and their families but was a necessity and a duty they felt they had to take on to make their parents proud and to essentially pay them back for the sacrifices they made in their own lives.

Of course the overall theme that working hard is important seems applicable to anyone, Latino or White. However, the details about how hard they worked and the challenges they went through were experiences that would set these students and their families apart from their White peers. The SSS students hoped that by writing these stories exhibit attendees might begin to understand and appreciate where they were coming from.

Responses to Working Hard and Overcoming Challenges

Again, we methodically engaged in reconstructive horizon analysis of the survey responses that focused on these stories of sacrifice and challenge. During this analysis we found that the responses reflected similar thoughts to those responses related to the first theme, the importance of the family. In response to a survey question about what respondents learned from the exhibit, many again responded in ways that at first seemed kind and supportive of these students: "That a lot of people work hard especially to support their family even if they had to drop out of school and they still achieved their dreams." Although at first this may appear to be a nice, gentle approach to answering this question, we believe it reflects the kind of simplistic, non-reflective thoughts we are concerned might overtake this type of work. The quick jump from "work hard" to "achieve their dreams" shows very little effort on the part of the survey respondent to think more deeply about the messages the student-storytellers are trying to relay about their lives and commitments. According to our reconstructive horizon analysis, then, this lack of effort and reflection is backgrounded in the survey responses.

Another response to this same question reflected more of the same kind of limited, uncritical thinking on the implications of these stories: "I learned how hard it is to be Latino for some and how some really are proud of their heritage. Also, it shows that not all Latinos have to be dairymen." Again, while we could say that it is promising that this respondent and, presumably others, have now learned that "not all Latinos have to be dairymen," is that really all the storytellers wanted attendees to take away? This same simplistic reflection was again backgrounded in many comments answering the same question, like "that people shouldn't judge Hispanics because they go through extremely tough stuff." Similar to the last theme's survey responses, we are concerned that these types of responses show a continued us-them mentality: "they" have hard lives and "we" don't, and that this can perpetuate racial misunderstandings and more deeply entrench the Freirean oppressive relationship at this school and in this community.

This same "us-them" mentality came out in answers to a survey question about what respondents might do differently if they were to engage in a photovoice-type exercise. One respondent said, "I would use pictures because I think it was nice putting a face to the story and it would be different because I didn't have as hard of life as they did." Another response is similar in relaying this backgrounded mentality of difference: "I would tell about my role model just like several of the students did. However, I wouldn't be able to share in the same struggles as a lot of them because my parents are veterinarians." Again, reaffirming what many respondents already feel, that "they" are different from "us," that "I" cannot really understand "them," and that that the source of that difference is almost purely economic (my parents have better jobs than their parents do), is not really helpful in meaningfully increasing understandings and breaking down oppression.

We continued to uncover strands of newfound understandings of Latino people and culture, as illustrated in this response to a question about what stories were most interesting:

All of the stories were interesting. A lot of the stories were about challenges their families have faced or are facing right now. They were interesting because I never really realized what they go through. I just see the kids in the hall and they seem fine and in class a lot of them act like they don't care about school. I will admit that some of them do try in class and it's good to see that.

Again, while new understanding and enlightenment was foregrounded in these types of responses, we were concerned with the backgrounded us-versus-them idea that kept coming out: "I will admit that some of them do try in class and it's good to see that." We also detected both surprise and reluctant acceptance in answers to these questions. These backgrounded messages show a deeply ingrained assumption that Latinos in this community and in general do not work hard or are in some way not acceptable.

Discussion

The stories the SSS students wrote for inclusion in their photovoice exhibit indicate that they wanted their White peers and teachers to better understand their culture, whether by illustrating similarities or spelling out differences. In particular, themes that emerged from those stories and accompanying photographs showed that students especially wanted White members of their school and community to understand the importance family and hard work to these students. While survey responses to the exhibit clearly indicated that these messages were received, our analysis revealed consistently simplistic answers and often backgrounded condescending tones in survey responses. We also discovered a perpetuation of an "us-them" mentality.

As our research group reviewed the survey responses we noted this lack of critical reflection on the part of exhibit attendees about the goal the SSS students had: to build bridges of understanding between the Latino/a and White populations at Atkinville High School. Then as we, this article's authors, engaged in more rigorous, systematic analysis of the survey responses this lack of reflection became even more obvious and disconcerting. But whose fault was it? Should the SSS students have done something differently? Or should we as trained methodologists have taken different steps? It was difficult to know what we should have done differently. We saw ourselves as part of a larger, democratic research collective, where the unique knowledges and goals of each member of the collective were equally valuable; so, who were we to say how the process "should" go? At the same time, though, did we shirk our responsibility somehow to make sure that space and time were set aside for more critical reflection so that the goals of the SSS student-researchers would be more likely to be met? How could we as university-based researchers have worked to protect against this lack of critical reflection, while still aiming for meaningful and true participation among our research collective?

As our research collective discussed our findings, student-researchers responded by indicating a clear lack of hope in changing their peers' minds or attitudes about racism or their Latino/a counterparts. Even one of the most dedicated student-researchers involved in this project said that "nothing can be done" and "no one changes" (Ailed, January 2013 focus group discussion). Overall, the student-researchers seemed resigned to accept these findings and move on.

Having taken considerable time to reflect on the group's findings and to ask ourselves why this happened, we are concerned that instead of being exceptional, these results are more

typical than we would hope. It has been our experience that K-12 schools in the United States do not specialize in teaching or modeling critical thinking skills, and so without our collective's explicit focus on and nurturing of exhibit attendees' critical analysis of the photographs and stories, the experience was taken at face value. We did not create an environment that pushed attendees out of their comfort zones, toward spaces of self-reflection or critique. This seems to be the missing link, and what some may call a limitation of this study.

This is disconcerting because it has been our experience that photovoice is often seen as such an empowering, emancipatory method that it is wholeheartedly accepted and employed by researchers or research collectives without forethought about what potential unintended consequences might be. So, while the photovoice approach itself cannot be judged as either simply good or bad, helpful or harmful, we have shown through this study that, although created for empowering and emancipatory purposes, photovoice has the potential, if not used in very specific, reflective ways, to allow criticism of the Other but not reflection on oneself. Our study illustrates that photovoice can unintentionally allow oppressive status quo relationships to persist, even to further entrench within institutions like schools. Essentially, photovoice has the potential to have the opposite effect than those desired. Although the purpose of this particular photovoice exhibit was to confront racism and build understanding between the Latino and White populations, it instead had the unintended consequence of deepening the divide and strengthening the oppressive relationship between the two groups.

We issue a call for more awareness of potential unintended consequences to using photovoice without first reflecting on its critical epistemological underpinnings. If we remember that it is founded on the idea that producing authentic knowledge is potentially liberating, then we must also remember to include in our photovoice approaches time and space for both storyteller-photographers and exhibit attendees to purposefully, critically, and authentically reflect on the knowledge produced through the exhibit. Photovoice should not be used as a final exposition of words and pictures captured and created by a particular community but rather as a first step toward an emancipatory production of knowledge that can be used to identify further steps to take in breaking down the oppressive relationship.

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